

## Frequently Asked Questions about...

# Drug Resistance and Antibiotic Stewardship

### Q. What is antibiotic resistance?

A. Antibiotic resistance occurs when bacteria change in some way that reduces or eliminates the effectiveness of drugs, chemicals, or other agents designed to cure or prevent infections. The bacteria survive and continue to multiply, causing more harm. This problem is one of the most pressing public health threats currently and affects the ability to effectively treat disease.

### Q. Why should I be concerned about antibiotic resistance?

A. Persons who develop infections that are resistant to antibiotics have increased risk of hospitalization and transfer to an intensive care unit, higher hospital costs, longer length of stay in the hospital, and higher risk of death. In addition, antibiotics can also eliminate “good” bacteria from the body, increasing the risk for developing *Clostridium difficile* infection, a gastrointestinal illness seen in residential facilities and healthcare settings. Antibiotic resistance is not just a problem for the person with the infection; drug-resistant bacteria are able to spread and cause illness in others as well.

### Q. What is antibiotic stewardship?

A. “Antibiotic stewardship” is a term used to refer to interventions or programs designed to improve antibiotic use. These programs have been proven to cut costs, reduce *Clostridium difficile* infections, and decrease the use of unnecessary antibiotics.

### Q. How can I prevent the spread of drug resistance in my facility?

A. There are several things that you and other staff members in the facility can do, including:

- Use antibiotics for their appropriate dose and duration
- Choose antibiotics wisely to reduce unnecessary antibiotic use
  - o Only prescribe antibiotics when they will be beneficial to the resident, even when the resident asks for one
  - o Target the likely pathogen as specifically as possible
  - o Avoid overlaps in antibiotic prescription – it is usually unnecessary to give two antibiotics to treat the same bacteria
  - o Never treat viruses (like the common cold or influenza) with antibiotics
- Assure that all medical providers are knowledgeable about appropriate antibiotic use, antibiotic resistance, and adverse effects
- Be familiar with resistance trends in your region

### Q. Where can I get more information about antibiotic resistance?

A. The Virginia Department of Health partners with the Medical Society of Virginia Foundation to promote an antibiotic resistance awareness campaign called “Get Smart Virginia.” Visit the MSVF’s website ([foundation.msv.org/Foundation/AntibioticResistance.aspx](http://foundation.msv.org/Foundation/AntibioticResistance.aspx)), VDH’s Get Smart Virginia website ([www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/surveillance/getsmart/index.htm](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/surveillance/getsmart/index.htm)), or the CDC’s national Get Smart website ([www.cdc.gov/getsmart](http://www.cdc.gov/getsmart)) for more information.

You can also consult the CDC’s “12 Steps to Prevent Antimicrobial Resistance Among Long-Term Care Residents” document located in the infection prevention toolkit for assisted living facilities and nursing homes.